

Timpani

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Timpani (Timpany, Tympany, Tympani, Kettle Drums)

A. Size

A set of two are 26" and 29" pitched in Bb and F respectively.

Add a 32" (D), 24" (A) and 20" (E) for a complete set of 5. Actual dimensions may vary.

B. Sticks

1 pair≠Cartwheel for very soft playing.

1 pair≠General purpose for most playing.

1 pair≠Hard for fast playing.

1 pair≠Very hard for articulated playing.

1 pair≠Wood for special effects.

C. Grip

French: Thumbs turned up, matched grip; less power, softer touch.

German: Palms flat, thumbs on side of stick; very hard playing posture.

American: Thumbs and palms at a 45° angle; moderate playing volume, can go either way.

D. Stance

Feet comfortably apart standing between the drums and in easy reach of the pedals.

Wrists in front of body.

Body faces music.

Sticks about 10" above drum head.

E. Style of Play

Sticks move quickly from drum to drum.

Strike the drum about 2" to 4" from rim. You have to play on the drums to find the "sweet spot" where drum rings the most.

Use single stroke rolls.

Roll slower on large drums since the heads vibrate slower. As pitch rises and you move to smaller drums increase speed of the roll.

F. Muting

Stop the drum from ringing when the note value ends.

Make sure you play on the area of the drum that produces the sound of the note and not the impact of the stick.

Strive for a full, rich sound.

Make sure you stop the drum from ringing when you play on another drum so the sounds don't "bleed" into each other, but don't shorten the note values. This makes for a much nicer, clearer sound.

To keep other drums from ringing when not being played use mufflers made from bean bags or small round sand bags.

Hint: Attach a string to the bags and tie the string to one of the struts so you can remove them quickly.

G. Tuning

Learn to sing scales. Use a tuning fork to find the tonic note of the key signature. Sing up to the notes to be tuned. Ideally you can tune the drums without the use of a harmonica (pitch pipe). That way in the middle of some beautiful piece of music we don't hear one of the "harmoni=cats" playing away.

If you must use a pitch pipe blow into it very softly. I recommend the Kratt F to F round pitch pipe.

Avoid using a keyboard instrument unless there is no alternative.

Tuning must not disturb the group's performance. No attention should be drawn to the tuning process.

I have several tuning forks in different keys to more easily tune silently.

Don't pound on the drum to tune it. Use your finger and "flick" the play area of the drum lightly. Wait a second and listen for the sound.

Tune down to the pitch, not up. The head stays tuned longer.

Be sure to muffle the other drums while tuning.

"Sympathetic vibration" occurs when the heads are not muffled and any sound makes the drum vibrate. Muffle any drums not being used.

H. Sticking

Avoid cross=sticking

Use alternate strokes as much as possible but use the sticking that helps you play the music the best.

Don't bounce the sticks unless the sticks are pretty hard and that is the only way the passage can be played.

Do not double=stroke the rolls.

I. Setting the Fundamental (Bottom) Pitch of the Drum

Place the pedal in the lowest note position.

Press in the center of the head with the palm of the hand.

Tune the lug closest to the pedal. Use that pitch to tune the others. The first lug would be your "master."

J. Working the Tuning Pedals

Pedals come in two types; balanced action or clutch lock.

Balanced action is like a gas pedal. You depress the toe and the pitch goes higher. Press on the heel and pitch goes down.

The clutch lock utilizes a post that the pedal slides on. You have to unlock the pedal by pushing on the toe

You use your foot to go up the post which lowers the pitch or down which raises the pitch. You then must push the heel down slightly to lock the pedal in place. If all this sounds confusing that's because it is.

K. Additional Comments

Use a stool when there are tuning changes in the piece.

A forte≠piano roll on timpani is achieved by striking the drum loudly, waiting a second and then begin rolling very softly getting louder as the music dictates.

All music is not performed the same. Use your judgment when playing the music to determine length of rolls or basic attacks.

Rolls can be started with either hand.

Rolls sound louder than single beats so play rolls softer.

When going from drum to drum try to lead with the hand closest to the drum you are going to. Lower pitched drums sound louder so compensate.

Make sure the stick you select is not too big for the drum size.

Always lower the pedals after rehearsal and cover the drums if you have covers.

Don't let anyone put anything on the drums. They are not a table. (Of course percussionists are exempt from this one!?)

Watch future issues of Bandworld for other Percussion Master Class sessions.

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